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ABSTRACT

In 1996, as part of the budget review process, Utah State University questioned the legitimacy of the outdoor recreation program in terms of student use, cost, and its role as part of the university mission. A task force was appointed to determine if the Outdoor Recreation Center should continue. This paper discusses program issues investigated by the task force: low student participation rate, lack of participant diversity, unfair competition with local merchants, lack of academic coordination or supervision in credit classes, lack of coordination between the Outdoor Recreation Center risk management plan and the university's insurance risk office, and the need for a more self-supporting budget. Some potential solutions are suggested such as: increasing accuracy in counting students using the program; promoting the program to a broader student base; offering more introductory courses; organizing a student advisory group; renting only to students and faculty; utilizing local merchants as board members; working more closely with academic departments for credit classes; preparing a risk management manual; establishing a plan for employee and volunteer training; promoting standards of care; soliciting grants and gifts; and increasing fees. It is concluded that outdoor recreation programs must remain broad, inclusive, and cost effective, and gain administrative and community support in order to be productive and successful. (SAS)

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DEFENDING THE LEGITIMACY OF OUTDOOR RECREATION PROGRAMS ON COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

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By Art Jones

ED 419 644

In 1996, as a part of the budget review process, Utah State University questioned the legitimacy of the Outdoor Recreation program in terms of its student use, cost, and especially its role as part of the University mission. A student fee increase was denied and a special task force was appointed to study all aspects of the program to determine if the center should continue. This paper will discuss the issues that were questioned by the University and suggest some basic solutions that may be helpful for similar programs.

The task force was divided into 4 sub groups to analyze real or perceived problems and to make recommendations to the President of the university regarding the future operation of the Outdoor Recreation Center (ORC).

The task force met under the direction of the Vice President for Student Services and explored a variety of problems, concerns and issues related to the center. The major concerns and some potential solutions arae listed as follows:

CONCERN #1

The reported student participation rate at the U.S.U. Outdoor Recreation Center was 4% of 18,000 students, similar centers around the nation averaged 20% participation according to the 1992 edition of the Outdoor Recreation Program Directory and Data Resource Guide. This was a serious problem to the committee because it appeared that there was a lack of student interest and support for the center.
Potential Solutions for ORC Administrators:

a. **Count everyone who uses the center for information. In Reality, according to the 1996 USU ORC reports, there were 6,762 students who used the ORC or 37% participation noted.**

b. **Don't count the 4,000 off-campus students in the average because they don't use the center.**

c. **Be more accurate in counting and especially reporting center use.**

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CONCERN #2

There were complaints that programs and services were being planned and directed by a small group of outdoor *"elitists"* to promote their own interests such as rock climbing, river kayaking, white water rafting, etc. This appeared to be the case because outdoor enthusiasts were visible and outspoken about their personal interests and concerns. In reality, however, the program was fairly broad and included a variety of classes, workshops, trips, evening programs, etc. that were available to everyone.

Potential Solutions:

a. Offer more introductory courses such as hiking, backpacking, canoeing, x-country skiing, etc.

b. Promote the program to a broad base of students.

c. Organize a student advisory group with students of diverse interests and backgrounds to help guide ORC decisions.

CONCERN #3

A few vocal downtown merchants complained of unfair competition because:

1. The center offered lower prices.

2. The program didn't have to pay sales tax.

3. The Outdoor Recreation Center actively advertised the yurt rental.

It should also be mentioned that many businesses viewed the center as beneficial because it helped promote an interest in the outdoors and thus stimulated the sale of products and services.

Potential Solutions:

a. Cooperate with merchants on prices, referrals and programs.

b. Only rent to students and faculty.

c. Have businessmen sit on the advisory board to speak for the intersts of the merchants.

CONCERN #4

There was very little academic department coordination or supervision in the credit class program. Most classes were offered through the evening school with little involvement or oversight from the University's colleges or departments. In some cases approvals were gained after the classes were taught.

Potential Solutions:

a. **Approve all classes through academic departments.**

b. **Follow class approval procedures.**
   - *** Instructor resume**
   - *** Course Syllabus**
   - *** Course Outline**

c. **Seek departmental cooperation and explore mutually beneficial program offerings such as student credit hours, recognition, recruitment, etc.**

CONCERN #5

The review committee was concerned that the ORC risk management plan was not coordinated and approved by the University's insurance risk office. While the ORC was conscientious about risk and safety, there was not a published document or approved guidelines in place.

Potential Solutions:

a. **Carefully analyze all Outdoor Recreation Center risks including exposure, hazards, frequency probabilities, severity probabilities and risk management plans.**

b. **Prepare a risk management manual for employees, participants and administrators to review.**

c. **Establish a plan for employee and volunteer training.**

d. **Promote standards of care for all participants, especially in the areas of greatest risk.**

CONCERN #6

The Outdoor Recreation budget needed to be more self-supporting. According to the Ofice of Student Services, in 1996, 49% of the budget came from student fees and University sources, while 51% came from rentals, trips, and classes. One item of concern on the part of the community was that there was no allowance in the budget for depreciation or replacement of equipment.

Potential Solutions:

a. Raise rental, trip and class fee prices.

b. Solicit grants, gifts, and awards.

c. Cooperate with academic departments for budget support.

CAMPUS REACTION

When the students learned that the proposed ORC fee increasae had been denied, there was a considerable sized group of supporters who filed in parade fashion on the President's Office and staged marches. There were several news articles and editorials in opposition to the decision. Many students lobbied the review committee and tried to get the larger community involved. In all, there was considerable dialogue pro and con over the center.

RESULTS

The task force spent over two months analyzing the ORC. In the end, the committee could not reach unanimous agreement over what should be done. Future direction of the center is somewhat dependent on another attempt at a student fee increase. In the likely event that no additional resources become available, the following program modifications were suggested to keep the center functioning:

1. **eliminate all trips.**
2. **eliminate the yurt rental.**
3. **eliminate 1 FTE staff assistant position.**
4. **eliminate rentals to non USU affiliated individuals.**
5. **increase rental rates 10%.**
6. **coordinate with academic departments for credit class offerings.**

CONCLUSION

It is assumed that outdoor recreation programs are common and popular when organized on university campuses. This presentation has pointed out that they should not be taken for granted. While important and an educational part of the university experience, these outdoor recreation programs must remain broad, inclusive, cost effective and gain administative and community support in order to be productive and successful.